DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 628 RC 019 598

AUTHOR Irby, Beverly J.; Brown, Genevieve
TITLE Establishing Partnerships among Women Executives in Rural School Districts.
PUB DATE Mar 94
NOTE 6p.; In: Montgomery, Diane, Ed. Rural Partnerships: Working Together. Proceedings of the Annual National Conference of the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) (14th, Austin, Texas, March 23-26, 1994); see RC 019 557.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Career Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Leadership Qualities; *Leadership Training; Management Development; Promotion (Occupational); *School Districts; Self Esteem; Sex Role; *Women Administrators
IDENTIFIERS *Career Barriers; *Networking

ABSTRACT

Career attitudes, fears, and misconceptions were examined among 44 participants in a course designed to promote educational leadership skills among female administrators. About half of the participants surveyed worked at rural sites. Questions were related to barriers women face in attaining administrative jobs, suggestions for overcoming barriers, fears that women face related to becoming an administrator, plans for overcoming fears, networking, and mentoring. Results of questionnaires were analyzed in the context of existing literature on women in leadership roles. Almost all respondents indicated negative attitudes toward their own abilities and a lack of confidence that they could do the job successfully. Eighty percent of the women indicated misconceptions concerning career advancement techniques. Comments reflected a lack of awareness of career patterns of successful women and a narrow focus on obtaining more credentials, serving on more committees, and working harder to advance in their careers. All of the respondents viewed networking as critical to career advancement, and 66 percent indicated that they were members of a networking group. However, when asked to describe their specific networking group, 93 percent described groups and experiences that are not typical of networking related to career advancement. The survey establishes the need for developing a training course to promote effective educational leadership skills among women administrators. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Diane Montgomery
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

Irby, Beverly J. and Brown, Genevieve
Sam Houston State University
Texas

ED 369 628

ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS AMONG WOMEN EXECUTIVES IN RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

For women beginning their administrative careers, it is imperative that training programs address skills, attitudes and issues necessary for effective leadership in the school and community. Training programs must begin with participant baselines of the essential components of leadership development. The basic question must be: Where are the women in their development and where do they need to be based on the literature regarding successful women leaders? A course, Women in Educational Leadership, has been developed to address such issues.

To facilitate course relevancy and applicability, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to the 44 female participants. Forty-five percent of the respondents work in rural sites, 25 percent in urban, and 30 percent in suburban. Questions were related to: 1) barriers women face in attaining and moving up in administrative jobs; 2) suggestions for overcoming barriers; 3) fears that women face related to becoming an administrator; 4) plans for overcoming fears; 5) networking; and 6) mentoring. Results of questionnaires were analyzed in the context of existing literature on women in leadership roles. The information most significant is the data that emerged in the following three patterns: lack of self-confidence, misconceptions regarding how to advance in an administrative career, and misconceptions related to networking/failure to network. No significant differences regarding fears, barriers, misconceptions, and lack of awareness or understanding of issues and concerns were revealed among the three groups.

Lack of Self-Confidence

Ninety-five percent of the responses indicated negative attitudes toward their own abilities and a lack of confidence to successfully do the job. The following quotes are representative:

> "One of my greatest fears is that I will make a mistake."
> "I fear that when I get an administrative job, I will not be able to please everyone -- my family, peers, and co-workers."
> "I do not know very much about politics; I have a fear of political missteps that will hurt my advancement."
> "One of my greatest fears in becoming an administrator is that I will face a situation that I won't know how to solve."
> "There is so much to know; I am afraid that something will come up and I will not know the correct answer."
> "I am afraid that I will not be able to do all jobs as well as I should: wife, mother, administrator, etc."

RC 019598

"I am fearful that I will be unable to make quick decisions and effectively communicate those decisions."
"My major fear in becoming an administrator is not knowing my job well."
"I am afraid I won't live up to the Super Woman syndrome-- the idea that I must be perfect wife, perfect mother, perfect friend, and perfect administrator."

The comments above indicate feelings of inability to live up to expectations of others, to make decisions and communicate those to colleagues, to know the job immediately, to solve problems, to be knowledgeable enough, and to be all things to all people. Forty-two of the women enrolled in the course indicated anxiety and felt that they were not equipped to meet the demands of leadership roles. Data found is in contrast to what Gardenswartz and Rowe (1987) posited where successful women leaders exhibit high degrees of confidence and great skills in every area. The respondents expressed in the study feelings of inadequacy and fear. These data would appear to indicate that the respondents (in initial stages of administrative careers or in initial preparation programs) are at the lower end of a continuum ranging from an extremely low level of confidence and high feelings of inadequacy to the confidence level described by Gardenswartz and Rowe (1987) as critical to success. It was important that these data be addressed in the course to ensure that the women received adequate training, support, and motivation in the skills and attitudes indicated to be important to successful women leaders.

Misconceptions About How to Advance in an Administrative Career

Eighty percent of the women indicated misconceptions of career advancement techniques. The ideas for career advancement were naive and narrowly focused on obtaining more credentials, serving on more committees, working harder, getting more education, and "just doing the right thing." Following are some comments of the respondents which point out the misconceptions:

"I believe if you just work hard and keep a positive attitude, then you `will be recognized and will be given opportunities for advancement."
"I plan to pursue my doctorate so that school personnel cannot possibly overlook me as an administrative candidate."
"In order to advance I feel I must obtain superior credentials."
"I feel that I will not advance without a great deal of study, hard work, outside experiences, university courses, and staff development."
"In order to be an administrator I know that I will have to work hard and do the tough jobs that no one else wants."
"In order to prove I am capable and organized, I must work harder in volunteering for more committees."
"To move up in administration I know that I must be current on teaching styles, learning styles, classroom procedures, the student population, etc., etc., etc. ... ..."

"I feel I must learn, work harder, and more effectively than others, especially younger individuals."
"In order to advance, I will find out what is expected of me and ask about those things that I do not understand."

Although a variety of research (Slick and Gupton, 1993; Brown and Merchant, 1993; Marshall, 1985) indicates that hard work alone is insufficient for women's advancement in administration, comments of these respondents reflected a lack of awareness of career patterns of successful women, a lack of understanding of what is necessary in order to obtain and perform successfully in an administrative position and a lack of awareness of the importance of a career advancement plan. McGrath (1992) emphasizes that being a member of a network, including men, is of equal importance to "hard work and competence."

Misconceptions Related to Networking/Failure to Network

Many women believe that if they obtain the required credentials and do a good job in teaching, or whatever job they're doing, they'll get that promotion they're seeking. That just isn't always true. Networking is critical (Collier, 1992).

One hundred percent of the respondents viewed networking as critical to advancement, and 66 percent of the respondents indicated that they were members of a networking group. However, when respondents were asked to describe their specific networking group or networking, 93 percent described groups and experiences that are not typical of current definitions of networking and networking groups related to career advancement (Farrant,1986; Schmuck, 1986; Green, 1982) such as:

"My networking group consists of the three high school chemistry teachers. We meet frequently to exchange teaching ideas and we cooperate to set up labs for each other and share test questions and materials."
"The networking group I attend is the Brazos Valley Foreign Language Collaborative meetings. I joined because I wanted to learn what others in my field are accomplishing."
"In my networking groups, I team plan, share responsibility for carpooling, and study with others working on their certification."
"I joined an informal networking group because as a new teacher I needed the experienced teachers' expertise and they needed my freshness."
"My husband and I discuss networking often because it is very important to his job success. The coaches wives organization is formal and provides job information. I joined because my husband is a coach. This group is very beneficial because I have had a chance to visit with women who frequently move, change jobs, and are viewed and criticized frequently by a community."
"I believe I network as I perform my job."

"We talk a lot about teamwork but not about networking."

The need for and benefit of networks among women has been well established in the literature (Slick and Gupton, 1993). Brown and Merchant (1993) stress the importance of women's valuing and maintaining contacts as they move through their careers, describing networking as a "primary measure of the success that they have in their own careers." Because networking is essential, particularly for women in rural and small school districts, it was critical that the women in the course were afforded opportunities not only to correctly identify a "career enhancement network", but also to begin to formulate strategies for establishing the network and to realize that career enhancing networking should become a priority.

Summary

Responses to the questionnaire provided valuable data in designing the course. Content addressed the three prevalent patterns: lack of self-confidence, misconceptions regarding how to advance in an administrative career, and misconceptions related to networking/failure to network. The course reinforced components of successful leadership already pointed out in the literature. Assignments, presentations and activities centered on the establishment of partnerships and moved participants toward the development of a career advancement plan. Successful women leaders shared experiences and expertise, served as encouragers and role models, and invited participants to be a part of their networks. Participants designed professional portfolios, created a professional networking register, formulated and updated resumes, improved their professional image, developed a five-year plan for career advancement, participated in a mock interview conducted by women executives, and interviewed male and female leaders in government, business, and education. Additionally, participants took the initiative to establish their own network--an area chapter of a state organization for women leaders (Texas Council of Women School Executives).

Future Agenda for Research

Formative course data analyses through journal entries and course interactions indicate feelings of high satisfaction among the participants, increased self-confidence, and belief that the course is addressing their needs. Summative data will be collected to ascertain the effectiveness of course activities and assignments and to determine if attitudes, priorities and levels of sophistication have changed. A longitudinal study is planned to determine long-term benefits of networking and the partnerships established as a result of the course. A confirmatory analysis will be conducted with other women who are initiating administrative careers. A comparative analysis is planned to determine if similar patterns emerge among males who are beginning their administrative careers. Data from rural, urban, and suburban participants will be compared.

REFERENCES

Brown, G. & Merchant, J. (1993, July) Women in leadership. A support system for success. in *Women as school executives: A Powerful paradigm.* (Genevieve Brown and Beverly J. Irby, Eds.). Huntsville, TX: Sam Houston Press.

Collier, V. (1992, April) Tips from a superintendent. Paper presented to Forward and Upward, Women in Educational Leadership Seminar, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX.

Gardenswartz, L. & Rowe, A. (1987, November/December) Getting to the top: The 5 success secrets of women who have made it. Executive Female. 34-38.

Green, M. (1982, Fall) A Washington perspective on women and networking: The power and pitfalls. Journal of the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors. 46 (1), 65-69.

McGrath, S. (1992, February) Here come the women!. Educational Leadership, 49(5), 62-65.

Marshall, C. (1985) From culturally defined to self-defined: Career stages of women administrators. Journal of Educational Thought, 19(2), 134-47.

Schmuck, P. (February, 1986) Networking: A new word, a different game. Educational Leadership, 43(5), 60-61

Slick, G. & Gupton, S. (1993, July) Voices of experience: Best advice to prospective and practicing women administrators from education's top female executives in *Women as school executives: A powerful paradigm.* (Genevieve Brown and Beverly J. Irby, Eds.). Huntsville, TX: Sam Houston Press.